

‘Thou’ as ‘you’, oudè ‘Tau’

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‘Thou’ should be pronounced in rhyme with ‘you’, and not with ‘Tau’, the Greek letter. The first syllable of ‘oudé’ in Ancient Greek was pronounced in rhyme with the present pronunciation of ‘Tau’, whereas the latter was in former time in rhyme with ‘tor’. So Hamlet’s letter to Ophelia,

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt, that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love,

is in a pattern ‘a–u, a–u, a–u, a–a’, in other words, ‘Ahu! Ahu! Aha!’, or ‘a u - - - , a - - - u, a u - - - , - - a - u’. The reason for these changes in proper pronunciation was perhaps that since the Elizabethan time English had followed the sound of the vowel ‘ou’ of Ancient Greek, while Greek had on the other hand adopted the English pronunciation of the same. If you look at the parallelism between *thou* – *thee* and *you* – *ye* the picture may become clearer. ‘Ee’ being but a long ‘e’ it would be phonetically either *thū* and *yū*, or *thao* and *yao*, and never *thao* and *yū*! On the other hand, ‘thee’, ‘thy’ and ‘thine’ rhyme in that same order with ‘me’, ‘my’ and ‘mine’, but obviously not ‘thou’ with ‘I’. Also, granted that ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ rhyme with ‘you’ and ‘ye’, yet not so do ‘thy’ and ‘thine’ with ‘your’ and ‘yours’. Again the vowel ‘ou’ may not have sounded ‘ū’ at all, but perhaps ‘ō’. So ‘thou’ and ‘you’ may not be ‘thū’ and ‘yū’, that is ‘iū’, but instead ‘thō’ and ‘yō’, that is to say, ‘iō’.